

YOUR
LETTERS

MAILBOX

You're in a helpful mood this month, providing us with advice on everything from scanning over a network to how to get hold of award-winning anti-virus software for nothing

★ Quality control



In recent issues of *Shopper* you've reviewed a variety of wireless routers. Strangely, your Best Buy routers do not appear to have Quality of Service (QoS) capability. I find this odd. QoS is becoming an ever more essential feature of routers, along with gigabit hubs, for those who need the extra speed.

With more people sharing a network at home and wanting to do gaming, VoIP and file-sharing, it is clear that good QoS alleviates the bottlenecks associated with shared bandwidth. I find it strange that this does not feature prominently in some of the higher-priced routers, such as the new Buffalo WZR-AG300NH-1 and Linksys WAG325N (*Shopper* September 2007) – at least as far as I can tell.

Darrin Maunders

Certain types of traffic, such as voice over IP, are incredibly sensitive to the amount of available bandwidth, and telephone calls can quickly become unintelligible if another service such as a long file download is hogging all a broadband connection's bandwidth. Quality of Service is a

way of sorting this out, by giving priority to the traffic that needs it.

Both Buffalo's WZR-AG300NH-1 and Linksys's WAG325N Wireless-N ADSL Gateway have 802.11e Quality of Service, which can be enabled through their management webpages. This automatically prioritises traffic based on type. We've been considering this issue for some time, and we'll be including QoS options in our specifications box for all future routers.



▲ Linksys's WAG325N Wireless-N ADSL Gateway can automatically prioritise certain types of traffic

BEST OF BOTH WORLDS



I can commiserate with Sholto Douglas (*Mailbox*, *Shopper* September 2007) over the lack of support for Windows 98. Some months ago I discovered that Zone Alarm will no longer be supported for Windows 98.

I do not like to change for the sake of changing, as some software that I use will not run on Windows XP. I have also been unsuccessful in obtaining a Windows XP driver for my scanner. My solution has been to upgrade to Windows XP but keep a working copy of Windows 98.

As my hard disk has a large amount of free space (50GB), I decided that my best bet was to set up a second partition for Windows XP. My C: drive runs Windows 98 and my D: drive runs Windows XP.

With this setup, I am able to make the best of both operating systems. I use Windows XP for all my internet activities as I am protected by Zone Alarm, and my scanner software can still be used in Windows 98.

Harry Cohen

Setting up a PC so that it can dual-boot between operating systems is an economical way to try out the latest versions of Windows without scuppering your old installation. Playing with partitions and boot managers is not the safest thing you can do with your PC, though, so backups are essential before you start.

We do sympathise with readers who have otherwise perfectly viable hardware that won't work with Windows XP or Vista. Although the price of a good

scanner or printer is very low these days, it's not very environmentally friendly to ditch a working device simply because the latest operating system doesn't support it. Dual-booting is a far greener solution than buying a second PC. However, we wouldn't like to guess how well a PC designed with Windows 98 in mind would cope with running Windows Vista.

There is another point to consider. We may be loath to move with the times, but the companies that make hardware and software are forging ahead fast. While we should expect their wares to keep working for years, regardless of later developments, they will eventually lose interest in older products and stop supporting them.

Software companies that have already given up on their Windows 98-based programs largely did so after Microsoft announced that it was stopping its support of Windows 98.

GMAIL WORKAROUND



I read with interest Rob Purvis's letter in the August issue regarding using a proxy to obtain a .gmail address in the UK. However, there is a much simpler workaround. Having signed up for a yourname@googlemail.com account, any email sent to yourname@gmail.com will still be directed to your inbox! Hope this makes it easier for your readers.

Mike Richmond

Lots of you wrote in to point that out. At least for the time being, the googlemail.com and gmail.com email addresses are interchangeable. However, it is possible

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that this may change at a later date. If you really want to grab and hold a gmail.com address, you'll need to fool Google.

On a vaguely related note, did you know that it is possible to mess around with a Gmail email address to create different ones? For example, Gmail ignores full stops in the first part of the address, so billgates@gmail.com is in effect the same as bill.gates@gmail.com. Likewise, mail sent to b.i.l.l.g.a.t.e.s@gmail.com will end up in the same account.

SCANNING ON THE NETWORK



I have just read the letter from Gary Watson in *Shopper* September 2007 regarding network MFPs and scanners. In your response you state that sharing a scanner over the network is not simple and that you are not aware of any consumer-level scanners that connect to the network. We use an HP OfficeJet 6310 in the office. This has a built-in network point and the HP software allows you to share all the features over the network, including the scanner and the fax. You can even choose to scan to a specific machine from the printer's own control panel.

Although I believe this model has now been discontinued, there are a number of other HP products in the range that have this functionality, and this is something worth telling readers about.

Paul Ebrey



After reading the letter from Gary Watson in last month's *Shopper*, I feel able to shed some additional light on his question of scanning over the network. I have a Brother 440CN on my small office network comprising four wired and three wireless PCs. It enables us to scan documents from any of the networked PCs, as long as they have the Brother Control Centre software installed.

It is not the greatest printer in the world, but the scans are quite good and the running costs are bearable. I realise it is in a different price category to the MFPs discussed in Gary's letter – the cheapest I have seen it for is £115 including VAT.

As a side-note, I would like to thank you for bringing our attention to Steganos AntiVirus 2007. Since your review, it has provided us with cost-effective protection and kept our machines trouble-free. Keep up the good work.

Tom Barnes

Thanks for the heads-up, gentlemen. In addition to the models you mention, HP's OfficeJet 7210 also supports scanning over the network. The OfficeJet 6310 is still available on Amazon.co.uk for £105 including VAT at the time of writing. The OfficeJet 7210 is around £50 more.

For those who have not tried it, scanning over a network involves using client software supplied with the MFP. This allows networked PCs to control the scanner remotely and to receive the scanned files over the network. As we noted last month, you'll still need to walk over to the device to insert the document or photo that you want to copy.

In past tests of networked scanners, we've found that they are much slower to use than

ones connected directly to a PC, even when using a fast, wired network. The range of available quality settings is also often compromised. Relatively low resolutions are used to keep the amount of data flowing over the network down to a reasonable level.

TROUBLE IN THE OFFICE



I was puzzled by your office suite comparison in last month's magazine. First, you omitted some well-established software, namely Ragtime 6 (a DTP-oriented suite), 602 suite (perhaps a bit basic) and Ssuite, which I have not had the chance to try, but would have welcomed a review of. There is also Siag (Linux only, but so what?) and Softmaker (which comes with PDA versions, too), and the article could have benefited from a sidebar about the supermarket own-brand software currently on sale.

Second, I got lost reading your review of OpenOffice. In the text you say "the macro function... worked perfectly" but in the summary the minus point is "Macro function kept crashing". Make your minds up.

Third, you reviewed OpenOffice.org 2.1 in a magazine with a cover date of September. Versions 2.2 and 2.2.1 were available by July. By the time September rolls around we should be up to version 2.3. How long ago did you write this? January?

Robert Harvey

We looked at the most popular office suites available, along with some free web-based services that offer similar features. Unfortunately, due to space restrictions, we have to limit ourselves to covering the most important products. While we would not like to cast aspersions on Ragtime, 602 suite and Siag, they are simply not as important to include as the likes of Microsoft Office 2007 Professional, Corel WordPerfect Office X3 and OpenOffice (which also runs on Linux).

Your point about the inconsistency regarding the macros is a fair one. We made a mistake when we said that OpenOffice's macro function kept crashing. It didn't, although it did when we used the almost identical StarOffice. Clearly there are some small differences between the versions we tested.

As far as cover dates go, we've addressed this old chestnut a number of times before so we'll keep it short. The September issue went on sale on 19th July, which means that it was written through June. We don't know what version of OpenOffice will be available in September because we are writing this reply to your letter at the very end of July, despite this being the October issue. If you think that's confusing, consider that we'll be working on the Christmas issue in a couple of months.

WRAP UP WELL

The packaging madness continues this month, as more readers send in their tales and photographic proof that equipment suppliers can go a bit bonkers when protecting items for shipment:



I read with interest the letter in your August issue from Terry Weston regarding over-the-top packaging. I recently took delivery of a new freezer draw front from Currys. The item itself measured 19x6x0.5 inches. It came in the bottom of a box measuring 23.5x10x11 inches, but was wrapped in a strip of bubble wrap measuring seven inches wide by 35 feet long. Is this some sort of record?

Jim Williamson



I have an unusual twist to the growing list of inappropriate packaging. My experience was the reverse of the other contributions. My hard disk did not come in a cardboard box at all – it arrived in a plastic bag. The total packaging comprised a black plastic bag, inside which was the hard disk in its own anti-static bag and nothing else, unless you count the silica gel.

This was a 160GB hard disk from Play.com. I've ordered from this company many times before and been happy, but not this time. Have you seen how ParcelForce drivers rearrange the boxes in their vans?

How did Play.com imagine that a plastic bag would ward off the rough, tough world of delivery vans? It is based in Jersey so maybe it imagines the path to the customer is a gentle one, just as they no doubt imagine that all footballers are as gentle-mannered as Graeme Le Saux.



WRITE IN AND WIN!

Everyone runs out of disk space sooner or later. One way to solve the problem is to send us a great letter. That's because Western Digital has kindly agreed to furnish our Star Letter writers with an award-winning 500GB My Book Pro Edition hard disk. This external drive connects using USB2 or FireWire. It supports both FireWire 400 and 800, and can transfer data twice as fast as some other external disks we've tested. Honoured with *Shopper's* Best Buy award in the January 2007 issue, this sleek-looking unit comes complete with Retrospect backup software and even has an LED indicator on the front to display how much free disk space remains.



PLUS!

Every published letter-writer who provides their address also receives a *Computer Shopper* mug



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Surprise, surprise: when I came to fit the new disk, it was faulty. Play.com has emailed asking me to return the disk in its original packaging. Are they having a laugh? I wouldn't even parcel up a dead hard disk in a plastic bag, let alone a live one.

Alan Thomas

BEST ANTI-VIRUS FOR FREE

Reading through the August issue, I noticed that you had a few paragraphs on Steganos AntiVirus 2007 on page 51 and also in your Labs. The product looked very familiar to me and reading your article clarified why. You say it "is a rebranded anti-virus program developed by Kaspersky Lab". You go on to say that "there is no difference between this product and Kaspersky Anti-virus 6", apart from logos and a lower price.

The reason it's familiar to me is that I've just switched my anti-virus software to AOL Active

Virus Shield. It appears that AOL Active Virus Shield is also just a rebrand of the Kaspersky software. As far as I can tell, AOL hasn't changed the software in any other way.

The best bit is it's free, saving you the full £28 price! Fantastic.

Rob Nickerson

It sounds too good to be true. And it is. When we investigated, we found that AOL Active Virus Shield is not quite what you imagine. While it is a legitimate, AOL-branded anti-virus program, powered by Kaspersky, it does not come with all the features you'd find in Kaspersky Anti-Virus 6 or Steganos AntiVirus 2007. For example, it does not analyse web traffic, support the creation of a rescue CD or scan encrypted traffic (as used by some email services).

That said, AOL Active Virus Shield does download updates from Kaspersky, which are made available every two hours. As a general anti-virus program, it has all the main features that you'll really need. If you want the full set you'll need to buy one of the two commercial products mentioned above.

While AOL Active Virus Shield is essentially free, there is a caveat worth noting. The terms and conditions includes a clause that many *Shopper* readers would balk at: "As a condition for your use of the Software, you agree to receive promotions and periodic email messages from us and our Affiliates." So, as long as you place no value on your email address, the software is free to use for a year. If you want to avoid email adverts you won't be able to agree to the terms. A valid email address is necessary to activate the product.

UP THE AMAZON



Today I went to Amazon.co.uk to buy 20 SD cards for a bargain £77.80 plus postage. After going through the checkout pages it was only at the final 'place your order' stage that I found out that the postage rate was a staggering £110.79. For a few grams, this is ludicrous.

After trying different permutations of the order, and reaching the same result, I spoke to a customer services human whose English was poor and had the demeanour of a cracked record. Hoping for a better communication, I queried the farcical postage rate in an email to the company.

The reply from Amazon was illuminating. Though Amazon boasts free Super Saver Delivery on orders over £15, the caveat in the small print is that this does not apply to third-party sellers in Amazon.co.uk's Marketplace. Only when you look closely at the sales page for an item can you see who is actually selling it. Yes, the information is there, but it is spread over many different pages.

What's that phrase? "Buyer Beware"? Or is it "Buy Elsewhere"?

Michael Emmel

That sounds like a disappointing experience. Often what seems like a great offer can evaporate when the final checkout page is reached. Additional postage and other charges, including VAT on the postage, can all add considerable sums to a purchase. As you have found, Amazon customers are not always buying directly from Amazon, which means that the usual postage and packing charges can differ



▲ AOL's Active Virus Shield will protect your PC, if you don't mind being bombarded with spam

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dramatically. At least you noticed before submitting your credit card details. No matter how boring it is, always check the small print.

POWERFUL ENCRYPTION



I like the idea of wireless electricity (*News, Shopper* September 2007), but will it be encrypted or will my neighbour be able to steal it like unprotected wireless broadband?

Stephe Cove

Surprisingly, it is already possible to steal electricity remotely. An electrical cable emits an electromagnetic field (EMF), which can be 'tapped' into by a nearby cable. Doing so drains power from the supply, so it really is theft, not just the absorption of 'spare' power.

There are numerous anecdotes about farmers sucking power from overhead cables running across their fields. Whether or not these stories are true, the artist Richard Box has demonstrated the possibility in an artistic, but possibly illegal, way at www.boxit.com/r.

It is highly unlikely that you'd be able to suck power from your neighbours using this technique, but the MIT research to which you refer could be more vulnerable. The news story we published said that the "technology works by converting electricity into magnetic fields, which are transmitted with the same resonant frequency as that of the target device's receiver". If you knew what that frequency was, presumably you could tune your devices into your neighbour's supply and charge your phone for free. Look out for a feature on wireless power in next month's *Shopper*.

ALL WASHED UP



I always thought memory chips were fragile things that need protection from things such as water and physical shock. But after a recent experience I think I've changed my mind.

I bought a new 4GB USB memory stick from Dabs for about £25. It was nothing flashy, just the basic Easy Disk variety. Having loaded it with video files to watch on my laptop, I stupidly left it in my trouser pocket on wash day. I noticed it was missing and looked everywhere for three weeks before my wife discovered it in the washing machine.

It had endured probably 10 or more washes, some of them at 60°C, so I wasn't expecting it to work, especially as water dripped out of the socket end as I inverted it. Sure enough, it didn't work, so I put it to one side, not quite able to bring myself to bin it.

I forgot about it for about 10 days, then I recently popped it into my PC just for the hell of it. You guessed it – it now works perfectly again. The colours in the videos haven't faded one bit and it also smells rather nice.

Alan Priest

Flash drives have an unnerving habit of failing just when you least expect, possibly due to exposure to random magnetic forces. However, because they have no moving parts, they ought to be pretty resilient to being bashed around and even submersed in water. They are rarely rust-proof, though, so we'd advise all readers who intend to launder their storage media to make a backup. It's also probably best to use a short spin rather than employ a tumble drier. ☹

Advertisers' index

1&1	82-83
123 Reg	79
Aspect	198
Asus	25, 94-95
AUT Direct	91
Buffalo	41
CCL	197
Choice Stationery	29
Cube	71-73
Dabs	53
Dell	2-5
Edimax	8
Evesham	103-107
Fasthosts	115
Fujitsu Europe	15
Gradwell	100
Kaspersky	58
LaCie	136
Laptops Direct	176
Mesh Computers	63-67
MT Electronics	57
Oyyy.co.uk	35
PC Nextday	80
PC Specialist	68-69
Printerbase	91
Realtime Distribution	92
Samsung	127
Sapphire	88
Time	112, 130

Classified index

247 ink	179
Abel Gratis	178
Cartridge Express	180
Data Track	177
Dataquest International	177
Eoutlet	177
Funky Giraffe	177
High Voltage	177
ImageTek	178
Inkwell	177
Manx	180
Mx2	178
Picstop	180
Point Set	177
www.computerbattery.co.uk	178

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